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ABSTRACT

Understanding and addressing the social structures that give rise to student violence require educators, parents, and society at large to adopt a critical, feminist perspective focusing on injustice and incorporating perspectives of marginalized students. Because practices of social groups play a critical role in self-identity, the violent actions of Eric Harris and Dylan Klybold at Columbine, directed at athletes and religious students, are best understood as expressions of collective violence, including the passive violence of adult nonresponsiveness. Typical models of justice, incorporating ideals of perfection, rationality, and fairness, fail to reveal the social context of violent acts. Only a focus on injustice explains the oppression perceived by Harris and Klybold and reveals their motivations. Where present, as at Columbine, Young's five following structures of oppression make violence predictable: (1) exploitation signified in exclusion despite computer work at school; (2) marginalization of so-called geeks; (3) powerlessness; (4) cultural imperialism by exclusionary groups; and (5) violence made inevitable beyond certain student anger thresholds. Only by understanding social causes can schools realistically address school violence. (TEJ)

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From Injustice to Indifference: The Politics of School Violence

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In the aftermath of the shootings in Littleton, Colorado in April 1999, we as a nation seem finally to comprehend that such incidents are not isolated occurrences. At the urging of President Clinton, Congress began hearing testimony from experts on teen violence and parents of victims of school shootings in their effort to create legislation designed to adequately address the causes of teen violence and to identify programs and approaches that work. The question persists, even now, why have we suffered so many school shootings in the last few years? At the core of this question is our search to understand why some teenaged boys resort to such devastating violence; how those boys could have become so isolated to conclude that there is no other way to gain the attention they seem so desperate to attain; and why some boys have become outsiders in their own communities.1 One purpose of this paper is to explore why certain individuals, particularly teenaged boys, lash out violently against their peers and adult authority figures (i.e. school personnel). To address this purpose, I will explore the concept of injustice within a society acting from a theory of justice. I will begin with a description of the social processes at work in schools that isolate certain types of students from the mainstream.2 Then I will offer a framework for understanding how the teens involved in recent school shootings in the United States could move predictably toward violence as the only logical response to their perception of their powerlessness3 based on Young's4 five aspects of oppression (exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence).

In keeping with the principles of feminist legal theory as well as critical legal theory, the focus on injustice rather than justice serves to keep the discussion "within a more fully contextualized, concrete situation"5 rather than in the more intellectualized, decontextualized setting within which "instances of justice occur."6 I will argue that to stop school violence and to reach those likely to perpetrate violence on others, educators must come to understand the issue from the perspective of those who feel isolated from the mainstream in the school setting. If educators, parents, and society, in general, do not learn to identify and then reach out to isolated students, we will continue to be shocked when those students turn to violence as a means of getting our attention. Rather than vilifying teenaged outsiders who commit violent acts, responsibility for having created, or at least contributing to, the conditions under which outsiders were marginalized must be apportioned to all who contributed to the conditions that lead to the powerlessness some individuals feel in mainstream society. Only then the social structures and conditions that perpetuate an underclass of social outsiders in our public schools can be addressed effectively and ultimately eliminated.

My primary purpose in writing this paper is to move toward a critical theory of juvenile justice that strives to provide a framework for understanding the proliferation of violence perpetrated by teens in American public schools and to provide the means to analyze the possible causes that lead seemingly normal, non-violent teens to inflict

deadly violence on their peers and school officials. The approach I take in this paper is a radical departure from the traditional approach to understanding school violence that examines the issue from the perspective of school officials within the existing social structure. A complete understanding of school violence also must include an examination of the phenomenon from the perspective of those who act out violently, namely students. That is the perspective that I will explore here.

Socialized Indifference: The Role of Social Groups in Identity Formation

Iris Young defines a social group as "a collective of persons differentiated from at least one other group by cultural forms, practices, or way of life.7 Groups serve two fundamental purposes. The first is an intragroup purpose where people come together in groups because they share similar experiences or ways of life. Characteristics internal to the group emphasize similarities among its members and create a sense of belongingness and affiliation individuals may not feel outside the group. The social group represents a zone of comfort to which individuals seek refuge from other groups or the rest of society, thus meeting group members' individual needs for affiliation with those who are similar to them in one or more characteristics, interests, or experiences.

The second purpose (intergroup) served by social groups is to make a distinction between groups. People are sorted into specific groups based on their differences from members of other groups.8 Some groups form or are formed as collectives for individuals with specific characteristics (i.e., age, race, gender). This type of social group goes beyond mere affiliation and contributes to the identity of members of the group both internally and externally.9 Such groups also create and define individual members' identity based on "a certain social status, the common history that social status produces, and self-identification that define the group as a group."10 Group assignment or exclusion from a particular group is based on individual differences stemming from a norm articulated by members of other groups or by society. Therefore, even if an individual finds a social group, based on one's similarities to other group members, those same individuals may experience feelings of isolation or exclusion by other groups within the same society because "a group exists only in relation to at least one other group." 11 Difference becomes relevant only in comparison to the characteristics of members of other groups. As such, groups help to define social relations among individuals or between groups.

At their most benign, social groups provide a place for like individuals to gather to share similar interests.12 At their most malignant, social groups are created externally initially, through the exclusionary behavior of members of an already established group who exclude certain people from membership because of the newcomer's differences from group members.13 "Social groups reflect ways that people identify themselves and

others, which lead individuals to associate with some people more than others, and to treat others as different."14

For Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, their exclusion was a slow process. Their transformation into the "Other" occurred gradually over time15 . Both teens were described as bright, friendly, and athletic by teachers and friends who knew both boys when they were younger. Both were active in sports, they were liked by their teachers, and they had friends at school. Then there came a time when each boy slowly withdrew or was eased out of the social insiders' group, leaving them without a group affiliation that would support their developing sense of self.16 As a result, both boys harbored resentment toward social insiders that grew over time into boiling rage. Their rage did not build solely because they had been cast out of the insiders' group, but because, as social outsiders, they were in a position to observe the differences in the way they were treated by their peers and teachers than the way social insiders, particularly athletes, were treated by peers and teachers.

The building resentment turned into seething anger when, a year before the shootings at Columbine, Klebold and Harris came under the authority of the juvenile court for having committed felony burglary. Both boys were put under court supervision where they were required to comply with a number of rules and conditions to fulfill their punishment. Their court supervisor reported that Klebold and Harris both completed their supervised detention early because they followed the rules and conditions of their court supervision "perfectly" (emphasis added).17

For two boys who had spent many hours playing video games, their perfect compliance with the rules and conditions of their court supervision might be attributed to playing a video game where one's score is enhanced by knowing and following the game's rules with meticulous precision. Clearly, Klebold and Harris were not like the typical juvenile offender who is notable primarily for failing to follow the rules and conditions of their court supervision. Here too, then, Klebold and Harris did not fit the characteristics of the relevant social group to which they found themselves assigned.

Klebold and Harris, excluded from groups at both ends of the social spectrum, had two remaining choices -- either forge ahead as individuals, independent of a group affiliation, or meet their psychological need for affiliation by creating their own social group.18 That they chose the latter is confirmed by their own words in the videotapes found after their deaths in which they identified their need to form their own group because of their difference from other groups around them. Once that distinction was acknowledged, they forged a new group based on their similarities with each other -- social outcasts -- determined to accentuate their difference from other social groups. Their difference from others outside their group became their similarity within their group -- a place where they could express their feelings among those who viewed the

world as they did although they seem to have shared their darkest thoughts and plans only with each other.19

Harris's and Klebold's focus on their differences from others worked to keep their difference in the forefront of their lives. Everything within their group emerged from a comparison of what was outside the group. It was that comparison, through constant scrutiny, that served to focus their rage on social insiders. The focal point was their difference from others. Young argues, and I agree, that the "denial of difference contributes to social group oppression."20 It "is commonly a group-based harm that is structural or systemic. Extending beyond disparate treatment, it is the inhibition of a group through a vast network of everyday practices, attitudes, assumptions, behaviors, and institutional rules."21 In social systems where differences are not represented or while unacknowledged are made invisible, justice is an elusive concept and members of some groups bear the full weight of that structural oppression.

The culminating events that appear to have caused Harris and Klebold to plan their assault on Columbine High School seem to be their arrest for felony burglary in January, 1998; the way the juvenile court handled the case of several athletes arrested for a similar offense a couple of months after Harris and Klebold were sentenced in Juvenile Court; and an incident where both Harris and Klebold were severely taunted by a football player in the school's cafeteria. While Harris and Klebold received a court supervised sentence, the athletes received a slap on the wrist. The court's deferential treatment of athletes struck Harris and Klebold as unfair which, in turn, caused Harris and Klebold to more readily notice the special privileges as well as the special exemptions athletes received at school. Like siblings keeping score as their parents differentially apply discipline to other siblings, Harris and Klebold apparently were making judgments about the equity of treatment of similarly situated individuals, and they were keeping score.

Collective Violence versus Private Violence

"... the difference between misfortune and injustice frequently involves our willingness and our capacity to act or not to act on behalf of the victims, to blame or to absolve, to help, mitigate, and compensate, or to just turn away."22

What Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold did at Columbine high school may be characterized as collective violence23 directed at a particular group of people24 rather than at specific individuals. Collective violence obscures the meaning of the violence when in the aftermath survivors and society seek to find the cause of the violent outburst thereby allowing them to attach meaning to the event so that they can understand, or make sense of the violence. The problem, in instances of collective violence, is that

there is no logical explanation for why the violence occurred or how the victims were selected. Brady and Garver25 explain:

> "selection of victims is impersonal in the sense that the only pertinent reason for attacking or destroying particular individuals is that they belong to the targeted group.... The individual victims may in fact possess all sorts of acceptable attributes; ... Such personal attributes make no difference as far as the point of the attack is concerned. Individual "guilt" or "innocence" is beside the point (p. 20).

Because of its indiscriminate nature, collective violence sweeps up the innocent victim as well as those purposely selected as targets of violence based on a mistake about the innocent victim's group identity.26 For Harris and Klebold, their primary anger was directed at athletes at Columbine high school, because athletes had viciously tormented both Harris and Klebold. But collective violence does not offer a complete explanation for all of the victims who were wounded or killed in the melee. Brady and Garver offer a second type of violence, private violence, that "is often undertaken ..., as an angry response to a particular situation, an injury or threat."27 This category of violence may help to explain why some of the victims were selected, namely the Christian students, or those Harris and Klebold considered favorites of teachers because of their academic performance or social status in the school.

Harris and Klebold did not shoot at all who crossed their paths on April 20, 1999. Inexplicably, Harris and Klebold were described by a witness "as looking through the windows of some of the classrooms' locked doors, making eye contact with some of the students, yet not attempting to break into the rooms or harm any more students."28

Collective violence offers one explanation for targeting athletes based solely on their affiliation with the group of athletes at Columbine High School.29 But Harris and Klebold also sought vengeance against all who had slighted them in any way.30 Members of that group were unaware that they would be targeted.31 Therefore, this subgroup of targets was unaware of their "guilt," and they had no control over their inclusion in the group of targets because Harris and Klebold silently selected their targets.32

Passive Violence

A third group upon whom Harris and Klebold wanted to vent their rage included teachers and administrators. When social outsiders tormented by social insiders for simply trying to have lunch in the school cafeteria,33 cannot find one teacher to come to

their aid.34 they suffer from what Shklar describes as passive injustice. That is, the failure to do anything when you see an injustice occurring.35 Shklar challenges us to look at injustice in a different way so that we can consider victimhood, and especially the sense of injustice that it inspires."36 Under most theories of justice, injustice is controlled by the practice of justice.37 Therefore, there is no need to actively address instances of injustice as they occur day-to-day because the remedy for injustice lies within the formal system of justice. However, a determination that injustice has occurred is made by those in positions of social and political power. If an authority does not define an incident as an injustice, then the system offers no legal process or remedy for the alleged victim of injustice. consequently, injustice occurs only within the confines of a socially constructed system of justice which, in turn, is defined by the rules and norms of the dominant social group.38

What we are learning, post-Columbine, is that students tormented by their peers have no where to turn for help. Adults in the students' world are passively unjust. Teachers turn a blind eye when students are targeted, bullied, and verbally assaulted in school hallways, on school playgrounds or in the classroom.39 School administrators tell parents of targeted students that nothing can be done to stop the verbal tauntings, that the victim "will just have to learn to live with it," and "boys will be boys."40 Yet, when bullied boys lash out at their tormentors, they frequently find that there is plenty that school officials can do to stop them by imposing severe punishments, such as suspension or expulsion, spelled out in the school's zero tolerance policy.

Parents of victimized students are frequently unaware of their children's daily torment because bullied students fear reprisals from both their victimizers and school officials if a complaint is made.41 Thus, student victims of bullying are left to fend for themselves because those who could help, refuse to help. that, according to Shklar, is the essence of passive injustice.

Eric and Dylan endured the physical and verbal assaults in silence. While most students at Columbine were fully aware of the physical and verbal assaults to which Eric and Dylan were subjected,42 school officials were unaware.43

Injustice: Rejecting the Normal Model of Justice

The shootings in Littleton have focused our attention on the problem of juvenile violence in a more serious manner than before,44 and our public consciousness has been raised regarding such issues as parental responsibility for monitoring their children's behavior. We are afraid that unless we can know who the enemy is, we won't be able to protect ourselves from the next teen shooter. And if we can't hold the parents of teen killers responsible, then we won't have anyone to blame for creating individuals who commit violent acts.45

We are torn between our feelings of sorrow for the victims of another's misdeeds and our feelings of anger for those who violate victims with their misdeeds. Nonetheless, we rarely "find the victims of injustice ... as interesting as their violators."46 The only exception would be when one questions "who the victims really are."47

A theory of justice maintains the status quo and normalizes punitive reactions against violent offenders without requiring social insiders to consider their contributions to creating an environment where violence is the last possible response by outcasts against the oppression they feel from social insiders.48 This myopia results in injustice to social outcasts and further fuels their isolation as well as the progression toward a culminating act of violence. If we do not recognize and then acknowledge that the bad are not all bad and the good are not all good, 49 we are doomed to experience more violence from teens, Failure to acknowledge the reciprocity of actions and reactions between social insiders and outsiders, and the role both groups play in creating the conditions under which violence is a natural reaction, will prevent us from understanding how children from our communities can do such violent things. It also will stymie educational, judicial, and social attempts to stop further violence against us all.

Justice offers us the ideal -- perfection, rationality, and fairness.50 Injustice turns justice upside down leaving us to question what went wrong and why. Injustice also urges us to pose different questions, the polar opposite of what we ask in the pursuit of justice. Injustice forces us to consider why some are victimized while others are not. Injustice also opens us up to consider who the victim really is, allowing us to ponder the possibility that a victim may emerge from the shadows to force us to view an event from an entirely new, and frequently uncomfortable perspective. By framing questions differently, a theory of injustice allows us to recharacterize the behavior of a perpetrator as a predictable response to the victimization of the perpetrator by others, much like the theory of justice holds perpetrators responsible for the victimization of others. 51 Shklar52 suggests that it is the theory of injustice , based on the philosophies of skeptics such as Plato, Augustine and Montaigne, that makes such an observation possible and the pursuit of an explanation of unjust behavior legitimate.

The skeptics focused on the shortcomings of the normal model of justice. To Plato, "the normal model [of justice] is an expression of deep ignorance."53 leading to injustice because "no one either gives or receives what is demanded by the normal social rules."54 Injustice, according to Augustine, stems from "our moral failures as sinful people."55 To this Montaigne added the psychological aspect to the concept of injustice. Montaigne's view of justice incorporates a psychological component which dooms justice to failure because justice is based on one's individual perspective. Montaigne argued that "we might come to know ourselves, but that others always perceive us differently. Our subjective, personal experiences are too various and incommunicable to be fit into general rules of conduct and the attempt to impose them tends to backfire."56

A system of justice that does not take into consideration the limits of our psychological and cognitive abilities,57 leads to a harsh and rigid system of justice.58 However, skepticism, casting doubt on the ability of citizens to create a just system, leads us to ask different questions that focus on the victims of injustice rather than merely attempting to create a just system. The fundamental question becomes, who are the real victims? 59 Is everyone a victim at some point? How do we determine who the victims of injustice are?

According to the skeptics' definition of injustice and who the victims of injustice are, one can view Harris and Klebold as victims of injustice even if their victimhood stems only from their own disturbed minds.60 Shklar poses the question, "Why does justice as continuous lawful conduct seem to cause us so little gratification?"61 Her response goes straight to the heart of the sweetness of revenge. "Perhaps there is no physiological response to the calm enforcement of the rules, whereas the frustration of denied expectations, rage, and fear involve physical reactions as well as moral ones."62 The pent up rage invoked by repeated instances of injustice that Harris and Klebold experienced at school appears to have required a visceral release that alone was capable of calming their internal torment.63 Harris and Klebold considered themselves victims of unjust social and academic systems in place at Columbine High School as revealed in their journal entries immediately preceding their rampage. Shklar explains that an individual's reaction to injustice is not to respond rationally or to seek legal assistance, one's reaction commonly is to seek revenge.64 The final entry in Harris's journal reveals the true impact of his outsiderness. He wrote, "I hate you people for leaving me out of so many fun things."65 Viewed from the perspectives of Harris and Klebold, the conclusion that they were just crazed killers misses the point. Their actions on April 20, 1999, from their perspective, were truly their vengeance on individuals and a social structure that they believed not only victimized them, but then ignored them.66

Young points out that justice goes beyond mere distribution of goods to include "... the institutional conditions necessary for the development and exercise of individual capacities and collective communication and cooperation,67 while "injustice refers primarily to ... oppression and domination."68 Together, oppression and domination exert "two forms of disabling constraints"69 that "include distributive patterns, decision making procedures, division of labor and culture."70 Harris and Klebold expressed, in their journals, the hurt, anger and frustration71 they felt at being excluded from virtually all social groups at Columbine High School--including the Trench Coat Mafia 72.

While the Columbine High School community, the survivors, and the police, among others, maintain their belief that the shooting victims were unjustly victimized by Harris and Klebold, Harris and Klebold believed they had suffered multiple injustices prior to April 20, 1999.73 If both sides can legitimately claim they have suffered

injustices, how then, can we determine who actually were the victims of injustice at Columbine High School when "Most injustices occur continuously within the framework of an established polity with an operative system of law, in normal times.74

This question requires us to determine if the actions toward each alleged victim of injustice would be publicly recognized as instances of injustice,75 or just an individual's subjective reaction to the incident.76 But that does not give us a complete formula for recognizing injustice because it does not include consideration of "who has the power to define the meaning of actions."77 It bears repeating that those who were killed and those who were wounded during the melee at Columbine High School were unjustly deprived of their lives or were physically altered unjustly by Harris and Klebold. But that is only one, albeit the dominant, perspective. A full understanding of why the shooting occurred, also must include consideration of Harris's and Klebold's perspectives78 on life at Columbine High School because an assumption that Harris and Klebold had no legitimate right to expect to be valued, acknowledged, or included by their peers and teachers is to conclude that their expectations were baseless and therefore, they did not suffer injustice, they merely suffered misfortune.79

The difficulty associated with viewing the Columbine tragedy from the perspectives of Harris and Klebold is that we don't see them as victims of domination and oppression. "In dominant political discourse it is not legitimate to use the term oppression to describe our society, because oppression is the evil perpetrated by the Others."80 And, clearly, Harris and Klebold were considered to be the Others at Columbine High School. But if Young is right in stating that "all oppressed people suffer some inhibition of their ability to develop and exercise their capacities and express their needs, thoughts, and feelings,"81 then Harris and Klebold cannot be excluded from the group of oppressed people for they had only their journals and each other with whom they were free to express their true needs, thoughts, and feelings.

Faces of Oppression

> "Oppression refers to structural phenomena that immobilize or diminish a group."82

Rather than an orchestrated, purposeful attempt to impose the will of the ruling group83 over others who are not in power, oppression names "the disadvantage and injustice some people suffer ... because of the everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society"84 When such constraints are imposed on groups, the resulting oppression is structural.85 The structural nature of this new type of oppression affects groups within a social system differently86 because:

> "Its causes are embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and

> symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules and the collective consequences of following the rules. In this extended structural sense oppression refers to the vast and deep injustices some groups suffer as a consequence of often unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions, media and cultural stereotypes, and structural features of bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanisms--in short, the normal processes of everyday life. We cannot eliminate the structural oppression by getting rid of the rulers or making some new laws, because oppressions are systematically reproduced in major economic, political, and cultural institutions."87

For Harris and Klebold, their physical appearance,88 their involvement with computer technology, and their lack of involvement in high school sports or academic achievement separated them from the social norm at Columbine High School.89 After the shooting, other, similarly excluded, outsider students posted numerous comments on Web chat lines giving voice to their experiences at schools across the nation.90

Iris Young (1990) has identified five categories, or faces, of structural oppression in her book *Justice and the Politics of Difference* that encompass the experiences of each of the oppressed groups identified by the new left during the 1960s and 1970s.91 While Young maintains that an individual may experience more than one face of oppression at one time, she does not suggest that the five faces of oppression could be progressive and cumulative. I will argue that the five faces of oppression, when viewed as a progression, culminate predictably in violence. Therefore, attempts to eliminate school violence necessarily must address each of the faces of oppression described by Young. Using the Columbine shootings in April 1999 as the context, and Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris as the victims of oppression, I will apply Young's five faces (categories) of oppression to formulate an explanation for why Klebold and Harris erupted in deadly violence as their only logical response to the oppression they felt by their peers and the social structure of their community and school.

I am not characterizing the Columbine shooters as victims to generate sympathy for them, but to discover an explanation that goes to the heart of what motivates some teenaged boys (and may ultimately motivate some teenaged girls) to strike out with such violence. I am hopeful that the explanation will lead to a more realistic approach to eliminating the root causes of violence, thereby improving the school environment for everyone. Before strategies to prevent school violence may be developed, the root of the violence problem must be uncovered and addressed. That entails uncovering the reasons why certain teens resort to violence. It entails an understanding of how our own

behaviors and actions have facilitated the isolation and oppression to which violent teens react.

The aftermath of Columbine has been a difficult time for students who are labeled geeks,92 freaks, or nerds. Because Harris and Klebold have been characterized as geeks, the geeks left behind have paid a huge price for their difference. Jon Katz has written several articles about the on-line subculture of geeks and recently told the story of two typical geeks in his book, Geeks: How Two Lost Boys Rode the Internet out of Idaho.93 Responding to Katz's online articles, geeks of all ages are providing us with vivid descriptions of their experiences in schools across the country. The following is representative of the comments made in the days just after the shootings by those who walk in shoes similar to Harris and Klebold:

> "I am a geek, and very proud of it. I have been beaten, spit on, pushed, jeered at. Food is sometimes thrown at and on me while teachers pretend not to see, people trip me. Jocks knock me down in the hallway. They steal my notes, call me a geek and a fag and a freak, tear up my books, have pissed in my locker twice. They cut my shirt and rip it. They wait for me in the boys room and beat me up. I have to wait an hour to leave school to make sure they're gone.
>
> Mostly, I honestly think, this is because I'm smarter than they are, and they hate that. The really amazing thing is, they are the most popular people in the school while everybody thinks I'm a freak. The teachers slobber all over them. Mostly, the other kids laugh, or walk away and pretend not to see it. The whole school cheers when they play sports. Sometimes, I want very much to kill them. Sometimes, I picture how I'd do it. Wouldn't you? But unlike those guys in Littleton, I never will. I value my own life much more. When I read these messages, I would ask other geeks to try and remember that, no matter what. And get online and make contact."94

Geeks all over the country reached out to each other following Columbine with words of encouragement as well as their own versions of life as a geek in American high schools They speak of pain, and alienation, and a fierce rage that has, thus far, been suppressed within them. One geek who graduated from high school 15 years ago pondered:

"Why is it that we as geeks, freaks, nerds, dorks, dweebs 'have to suffer while the clueless, bow-headed, t[e]stosterone poisoned "normal people are allowed to get away with murder.' I wonder just how many outcasts have been driven to suicide because of just one too many tauntings or practical jokes on a particular afternoon"95

Exploitation

The first face of oppression, identified by Young, is exploitation. Relying on C. B. Macpherson's reconstruction of Marx's theory of exploitation, Young defines exploitation as the transfer of power from the worker to the capitalist class to the detriment of the worker. The injustice of exploitation in a capitalist society is that in the transfer of power, the worker loses more power than the worker willingly gives in the process of work because the worker suffers material deprivation and loss of control in the process.96 More specifically:

> "The central insight expressed in the concept of exploitation, then is that this oppression occurs through a steady process of the transfer of the results of the labor of one social group to benefit another. The injustice of class division does not consist only in the distributive fact that some people have great wealth while most people have little. Exploitation enacts a structural relation between social groups. Social rules about what work is, who does what for whom, how work is compensated, and the social process by which the results of work are appropriated operate to enact relations of power and inequality. The relations are produced and reproduced through a systematic process in which the energies of the have-nots are continuously expended to maintain and augment the power, status, and wealth of the haves."97

For Harris and Klebold, they suffered from exploitation in the form of the resulting constructed social relation between social groups at Columbine High School that used their talents, but excluded them socially. In that setting, Harris and Klebold were encouraged to exercise their capacities by using their knowledge of computers to maintain the school's Internet service, but they had to do so under the control of school officials, according to the purposes of school officials, and for the benefit of school officials.98

Left free to explore the capabilities of the school's computer system, Harris and Klebold, like countless other geeks, would have been free to develop their capacities (knowledge of computers), that would, in turn, have benefited the school and the student body in untold ways. When geeks are free to explore the capabilities of a large computer system, they not only increase their skills and knowledge that then can be used to the

benefit of the school by way of maintaining the current computer system, but geeks also discover ways to improve the capacity of the existing system through experimentation on the system. And, most importantly, Harris and Klebold would have provided that service to the school for free.99

Geeks in this country are disadvantaged because they have knowledge and skills that few have, but that most increasingly need in our exploding technology-based society. The existing relation between the social groups, geek and non-geek, is in a state of flux. Also in flux is the existing power relation between the two groups. Non-geeks need geeks to keep their computers up and running. Geeks are discovering that the demand for their knowledge and expertise gives them power they have not had before. They are getting a taste of what insiderness feels like, and they also are discovering the power that comes from being an insider.

But despite their expertise with computers and their willingness to maintain the Columbine High School's computers, Harris and Klebold remained social outsiders to teachers, school administrators, and students who deprived them socially and academically and controlled their access to the school's computers resulting in a double penalty for their difference. Justice requires the "eliminate[ion of] institutional forms that enable and enforce [the] process of transference" of power, replacing them with "institutional forms that enable all to develop and use their capacities in a way that does not inhibit, but rather can enhance, similar development and use in others."100 However, the school and other social insiders had the power to establish the social rules that defined what constituted work (maintaining the school's computers); who performs the work and for whom, thereby establishing who occupies the role of worker and who are members of the capitalist class. As workers, Harris and Klebold transferred their power (computer knowledge) to members of the capitalist class (administrators) who had the power to "extract benefits"101 from Harris and Klebold that depleted Harris and Klebold's power in excess of what they gained from being allowed access to the school's computers. Despite the value of the service Harris and Klebold provided the school, the value of that service was determined by social insiders who clearly did not value the service in terms of what benefit the school received from Harris and Klebold's work. They remained social outsiders in spite of their work.

Finally, "the social processes by which the results of work are appropriated"102 were designed to extract the maximum benefit for the school with minimum benefit to Harris and Klebold. For their work, they received no recognition within the school community, thus their value was unacknowledged, uncompensated, and invisible to others. Harris and Klebold were exploited by the school resulting on the transfer of their power over technology to the benefit of the school, for which they expended more in the transfer than they received.

Marginalization

Young characterizes marginalization as the most dangerous form of oppression because "a whole category of people is expelled from useful participation in social life."103 The danger of being marginalized is that the individual is not afforded the opportunity to participate in socially productive activities.104 Being pushed to the margins of society has two significant effects on those marginalized. First, there is a possible economic deprivation resulting from exclusion of marginals from work that is recognized and rewarded financially.105 While many geeks have been relegated to that position in the past, things are changing as we become more reliant on technology. With that reliance comes a need for those capable of maintaining and operating technological systems.

However, for geeks in high school, being pushed to the margins before they have entered the economic market can foreclose them from the upper echelon positions available to those geeks who go on to prestigious colleges and universities and have access to the best training and equipment, thus preparing them for the best techno-jobs in the nation. Geeks, who cannot survive the harassment in high school, drop out. They are relegated to low level jobs in the technology industry. The worst fate for a geek is to end up working at an IT help desk.106

The second injustice associated with marginality is that marginalization "blocks the opportunity to exercise capacities in socially defined and recognized ways."107 For Harris and Klebold, technology would have provided them with a social place to exercise their capacities if they had survived high school. However, their outsider status in high school did not allow them the necessary independence to truly hone their technology skills, or to be recognized socially for their productive activities (maintaining school's computer system). As students with technological knowledge, they were useful to school officials. But at the same time, they were not adult technology experts, so Harris and Klebold were subject to the authority of school officials who controlled Harris's and Klebold's emerging capacities as technology experts. In the adult world, Harris and Klebold not only would have commanded respect and authority, they also would have had the power to make the rules governing their computer work, and they would have had the power to control their own lives.108 Compared to the athletes at Columbine High School, Harris and Klebold operated on the periphery of the social context, never recognized or valued as cooperative, productive members to the Columbine High School community. Therefore, they were marginalized by the Columbine High School community.

Powerlessness

Existing and working in a social system that neither recognizes nor values the work of marginals leads to feelings of powerlessness. Young identifies ten indicators of

powerlessness. 1) "Those who lack authority or power"; 2) "Those over whom power is exercised"; 3) Those who "must take orders and rarely having the right to give them"; 4) Those who "have little or no work autonomy"; 5) Those who "exercise little creativity or judgment in their work"; 6) Those who "have no technical expertise or authority"; 7) Those who "express themselves awkwardly, especially in public"; 8) Those who "do not command respect"; 9) Those who have negative status; and 10) Those who "lack authority, status, and sense of self that professionals tend to have."109 Harris and Klebold experienced most of the indicators of powerlessness and even those indicators that, arguably, Harris and Klebold did not experience directly, were imposed on them by virtue of the fact that Harris and Klebold were almost invisible to their classmates and teachers thereby stripping them of the minimal power they might otherwise have had if they had had any value to the Columbine High School community.

For example, indicators four, "those who have little or no work autonomy"; five, "those who exercise little creativity or judgment in their work"; and six, "those who have no technical expertise or authority," would not apply if Harris and Klebold had been treated as professionals when they were asked to work on the school's computers. Geeks add to their technological knowledge and skill by having free access to large computer systems on which they learn new things as they surf or game on the system. In so doing, they find new viruses and how to keep their system safe before the virus attacks the computer, among other useful information designed to maintain a computer system and network.110 It's doubtful that Harris and Klebold were given that much freedom to explore the school's computer. As a result, the tool (the computer) that would have increased Harris's and Klebold's productive capacities was only offered partially to them. All of the other indicators of powerlessness were clearly present in Harris's and Klebold's lives at Columbine. Any one or combination of factors would certainly contribute to marginalization of an individual and lead to feelings of powerlessness in that setting.

Cultural Imperialism

> "... to experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of ones own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one's group and mark it out as the Other."111

To suffer the impact of cultural imperialism is to be subjected to the construction of a social norm based on the universalization of the dominant group's experience and culture that not only marks the "Other" as different, but also renders the "Other" invisible. The "Other" is measured against the dominant norms. Failure to meet these

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norms results in a reconstruction of the "Other's" difference as deviance and inferiority and that leads to their invisibility. The "Other" searches for acceptance and recognition, but finds that (s)he is "defined from the outside, positioned and placed by a network of dominant meaning [(s)he] experience[s] as arising from elsewhere, from those with whom they do not identify and those who do not identify with them."112

The torment and abuse to which Harris and Klebold were subjected at Columbine High School clearly communicated to Harris and Klebold that they had been marked as deviant by their peers. However, Harris and Klebold lived in another world quite separate from the world of Columbine High School where they had power over others, where they could create a new vision of themselves that gave them social value. Because their private personas did not coincide with the stereotypes attached to them at school, Harris and Klebold developed "double consciousness"113 as a means of survival.

Their double consciousness caused inner conflict due to the fact that in their online world, Eric and Dylan had the power to create a world in which they had the power to define the social norms, thus elevating their perception of their own superiority. However, when they entered the Columbine world, their perception of their superiority clashed with the perception of them held by their classmates who considered Eric and Dylan to be outside the social norm and definitely not superior to social insiders. Such a clash of perceptions, Baumeister (1999) explains, frequently leads to violence when others seemingly challenge an individual's superiority through words or actions the individual interprets as "deliberate personal attacks"114 designed to undermine his/her self-esteem. from this Baumeister concludes that ones "hypersensitivity to insults ... makes it possible to understand what might otherwise appear to be senseless violence."115 Commenting a a man who beats his wife, Baumeister states,:

The driving force was his own pride, his high self-esteem, his male ego. He was so intent on being superior to her that he watched for any little episode or remark that could possibly be interpreted as reflecting badly on him, and whenever he found one he turned violent against her in response.116

Baumeister goes on to say that from the abuser's perspective, his need for high self-esteem justifies the beating he inflicts on his wife for her public comments that humiliated him.117

A classmate of Eric Harris, Tiffany Typher, commented in the immediate aftermath of the Columbine shooting:

They hassled him, definitely, ... Everywhere they went, they were taunted and teased about ow they dressed, about being gay. You could tell he'd get upset by it. Most of the people in that group, when people teased them, they walked off and didn't say anything.

But he seemed really fired up when he talked about the jocks. I had no idea his hate would drive him this far."118

From the videos left by Eric and Dylan, we see that they privately asserted their superiority over classmates, and especially jocks at Columbine High School. In light of Baumeister's study, Eric and Dylan's private protestations of superiority apparently led them to believe that a resort to violence against those who had ridiculed and humiliated them at school was perfectly justified as the means through which Eric and Dylan could reestablish their superiority and restore their self-esteem, Additionally, the injustice associated with cultural imperialism, leads to a build up of anger and rage in search of a way to exact revenge for being "devalued, objectified, [and] stereotyped."119

Violence

The final face of oppression, I argue, is inevitable. After suffering one face of oppression after another, the "Other" has had ample opportunity to build enough rage so that it reaches an explosive point where all that remains is to find a release for the anger. There are multiple objectives to be achieved through violence. First, the initial release of anger in the form of violence is an attempt to regain a sense of equilibrium or return to the status quo. Like a covered pot of boiling water, there comes a point where the internal boiling seeks release from the confines of the pot. As it does so, some of the water spills over the sides of the pot onto the stove. Likewise, pent up anger causes internal turmoil in the individual which remains contained inside until a critical point is reached (i.e. boiling point) at which time the individual searches for release of at least some of the anger, so that there can be a return to a level at which the individual can function without eruption. For those who contain their rage without periodic "venting," the build up of anger will result in a spill over like a pot boiling over. Anything or anyone in the path of the boil over will likely experience some level of anger as the "Other" lashes out (i.e. violence due to road rage or "going postal").

Second, violence is an unmistakable way to assert power over another, or to gain control over another. Harris and Klebold began the day, April 20, 1999, by making their last videotaped messages. In the videos, they spout their anger at particular individuals and groups, giving us some clues about the sources of their anger. Those videotaped messages can be likened to the pot of boiling water as it begins to overflow. The anger is still somewhat contained, but for the first time, Harris and Klebold began to release the details of their anger that they had kept pent up until then. Those videotapes are really the first time Klebold gave any indication, for public consumption, of how he felt while Harris had been posting his angry messages on the web for months before the shootings. But no one paid any attention to Harris' violent threats on the Web.

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Third, when Harris and Klebold entered the school, they forcefully took control over everyone who had, in their words, ignored or slighted them. They finally had the power to control all of their enemies. In the cafeteria, and particularly in the library, Harris and Klebold defined the standard or social norm for the day. It was Harris and Klebold who now taunted and harassed their fellow students and walked the halls of the school in complete control of everyone.

Fourth, the big eruption of anger came almost immediately as they approached the school building. The first shots were fired as they walked toward the school killing and wounding several students either having lunch or walking to their cars. The angry outburst and the level of violence intensified as they proceeded through the school's corridors to the cafeteria, where they planted bombs, and then on to the library where the majority of their rage was released.

Finally, Harris and Klebold exacted excessive payment from insiders for the oppression the dominant group had inflicted on them. When their rage was sated, they chose to kill themselves for reasons we will never truly know. In a bizarre twist, because Harris and Klebold also died that day, they robbed the survivors and society in general, of the ability to punish them for their outburst. However, their parents are not as fortunate.120

Conclusion

The question is, how can we use the tragedy of Columbine as a tool to uncover the root causes that motivated Harris and Klebold to kill their peers so that we can take steps to reach the next potentially violent students before there is another school shooting. We need to learn how to talk to the geeks, how to address the issues of geek bashing so their voices are not silenced. We need to provide a communication network for geeks so they have a community where their voices are heard. We also need to train teachers, school administrators and students that geek bashing will not be tolerated. That is, employ the same approach to eliminate geek bashing that we employ to educate about sexual harassment.

as we have seen through news reports, the videotapes, and interviews with the survivors, there was ample evidence before the shootings that certain students were being subjected to severe and repeated abuse by their peers, yet school officials were caught off guard when the shootings occurred. They were unaware that there was a Trench Coat Mafia, or that some of the students in their care were being taunted by their peers. We need to ask why school officials were unaware when students clearly observed the torment of their peers regularly, if not daily.

Violence of this kind and severity will not disappear on its own. Unless we are prepares to uncover and then address the root causes of this type of violence, including a realistic examination of all those who contribute to a social system where disrespect, and

verbal and physical torment are condoned, or who turn a blind eye to those behaviors of social favorites in a vain attempt to create an untrue vision of the social system, other social outsiders will be left to their own devices to contain their growing anger and to survive high school without exacting a violent toll for their suffering.